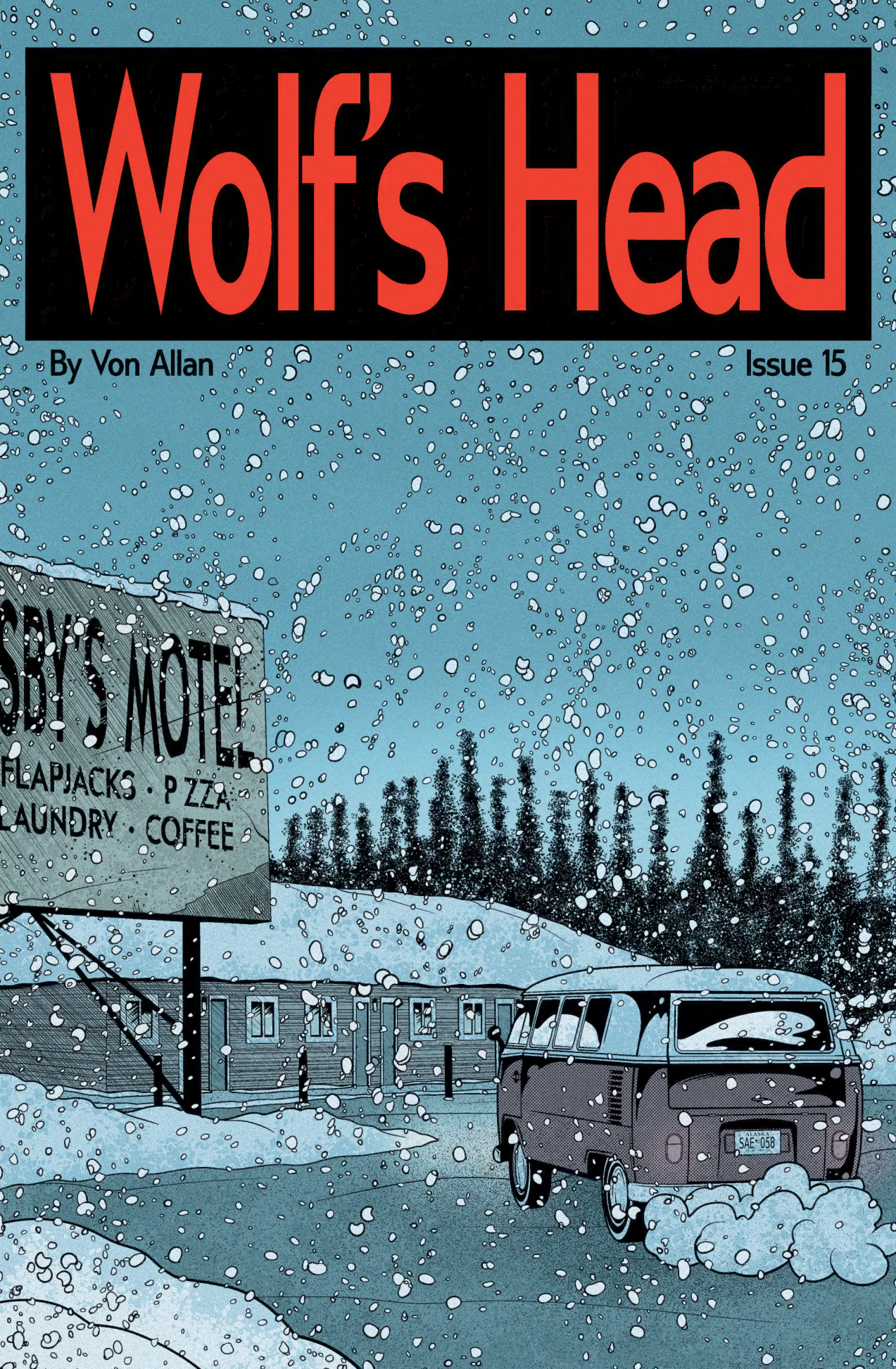
Wolf's Head

By Von Allan

Issue 15



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By Von Allan

Edited by Sam Boswell

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Ottawa

Post Airport, Flat City, Alaska. January 14th, 2019. 10:45 AM.
Can't believe you're leavin' us, Lauren.
I know, Chuck, but it's time to go. I've got unfinished business back in Detroit. Friends I've ignored for far too long.
I haven't seen you for a bit. When did you get the arm cast removed?
'Bout a month or so ago, Fang. Nice to have my arm back. And no more itches!
Itching? I bet! You needed to take more of my 'righteous bud,' daddy! Killed that itch in no time!
Maybe, Foolbert! It was *great* for pain, but it really knocked me on my ass. I still needed to work!
Work? You just gotta get strategic about when to take it, daddy. Sankó here could have taken over!

My doggie? Don't think my boss would have been keen on that!
Are you sure you're up for this?
Nope. I like it up here, but I gotta get back to Detroit.
It's home, but it's also where this little guy came from.
You've all seen the amazing things this artificial intelligence can do. How it can change shape and everything. The company that invented it wants it back.
Keep it subtle, guys! The pilot *can't* see you!
I came to Alaska in the first place to *hide* from them, but I can't hide forever. At some point they're going to come looking for us.
The only way to keep everyone safe is to *end* this once and for all.
Maybe, Lauren, but Detroit is real far away. If you get in trouble, we won't be able to help. Yer takin' an awful risk here. Is that 'Machine thing' worth it?
Yeah, yeah it *is*. And I think you know that, too.
Okay, yeah. *Fuck*.
The flight should be quick. 'Bout two hours or so.
I wish I could just drive to Anchorage.
Driving ain't easy from here. A bush plane is the way to go.
Yup. Once there, I'll go pick up the VW Bus.
Bus? A *hippie van*, daddy! Right on, Lauren!
Ha! Thank Chuck, not me! He set it all up!
It's Cheryl's old VW, Foolbert. She's been looking to sell it for awhile. I put her an' Lauren together.
Purchase is done, title's transferred, an' Lauren just needs to pick 'er up. Winter road trips are *tough*. You need a good set of wheels and this ol' battleship will do the trick.

Money?
Not much left from my share*, Maggie. Covered my medical bills and the VW. There's enough left to get to Detroit, but then I'll be broke *again*.
* See last issue -- V
You could always sell drugs, daddy!
Uh-*huh*. Black woman dealing, huh? Quick way to end up in jail.
Jail? Good point, Lauren, daddy. Pigs be pigs.
What about the Canadian border?
I've got my passport. Sorted that out last spring, after I had a friend help me avoid that stupid company by *sneaking* us out of Detroit.
Then it was up into Canada and out here. That way my little 'friend' didn't have to pass through airport security.
Border security is tricky enough. I wouldn't want to press my luck with a major airport, especially with all of their beefed up security.
My watch says it's time to go!
You take care of Lauren and her doggie, eh, Mikey boy?
Yes, Chuck, of course.
If anything happens, there'll be hell to pay!
If anything happens, we'll be *dead*, ha!
Listen, Lauren. Any time, any place, anywhere... if you *ever* need me, you just call, okay? I'll get there.
Aw, Chuck. I love you, my friend.
Me, too, Lauren. Me, too.
We'll get your dog secured in the seats once you're onboard.
You bet.
Bye, daddy!
Be safe!
Goodbye, Lauren!
G-goodbye.

11:07 AM.
This is a de Havilland DHC-2 Beaver, the work-horse of the north. *Perfect* for bush country.
Fly anywhere, land anywhere--hell, the more rugged terrain the better! I think you'll enjoy it, Lauren.

Well, Machine, you did a great job transforming into doggie ear muffs! Make sure that Mike *doesn't* see you, okay?
♫ Lauren! ♫
And keep quiet, huh?

11:23 AM.
Not sure about going back to Detroit. I know, I know, I talked a good game to Chuck and the others.
But ARPC and Hamilton, that asshole CEO of theirs, want you *back*.

We've been lucky over the last year. You hurt Hamilton pretty good*.
I bet he's healthy now, though.
* See #6 -- V

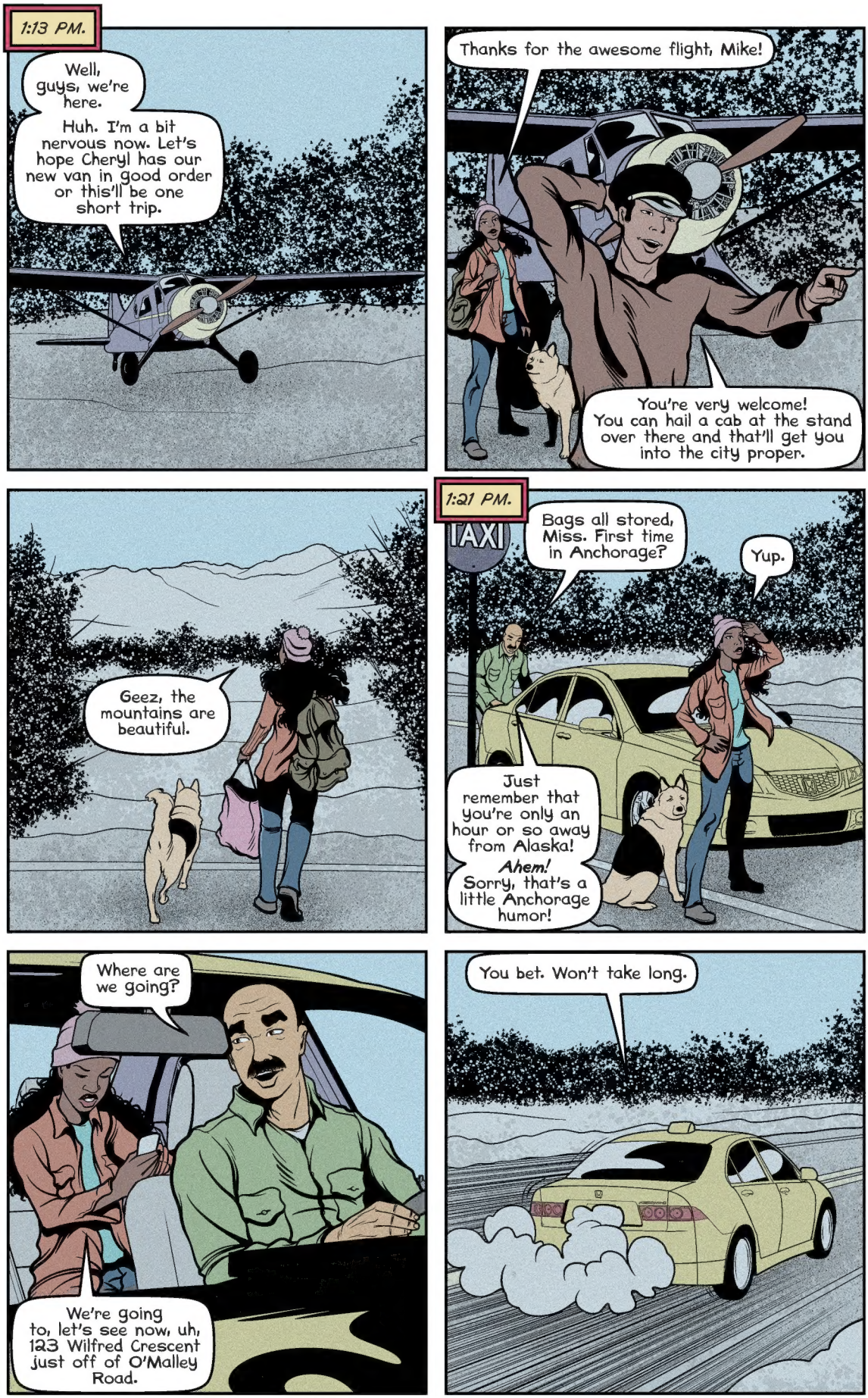
I have some internet alerts setup for Hamilton, but it's like he's disappeared. Not much I can do right now but keep watching.

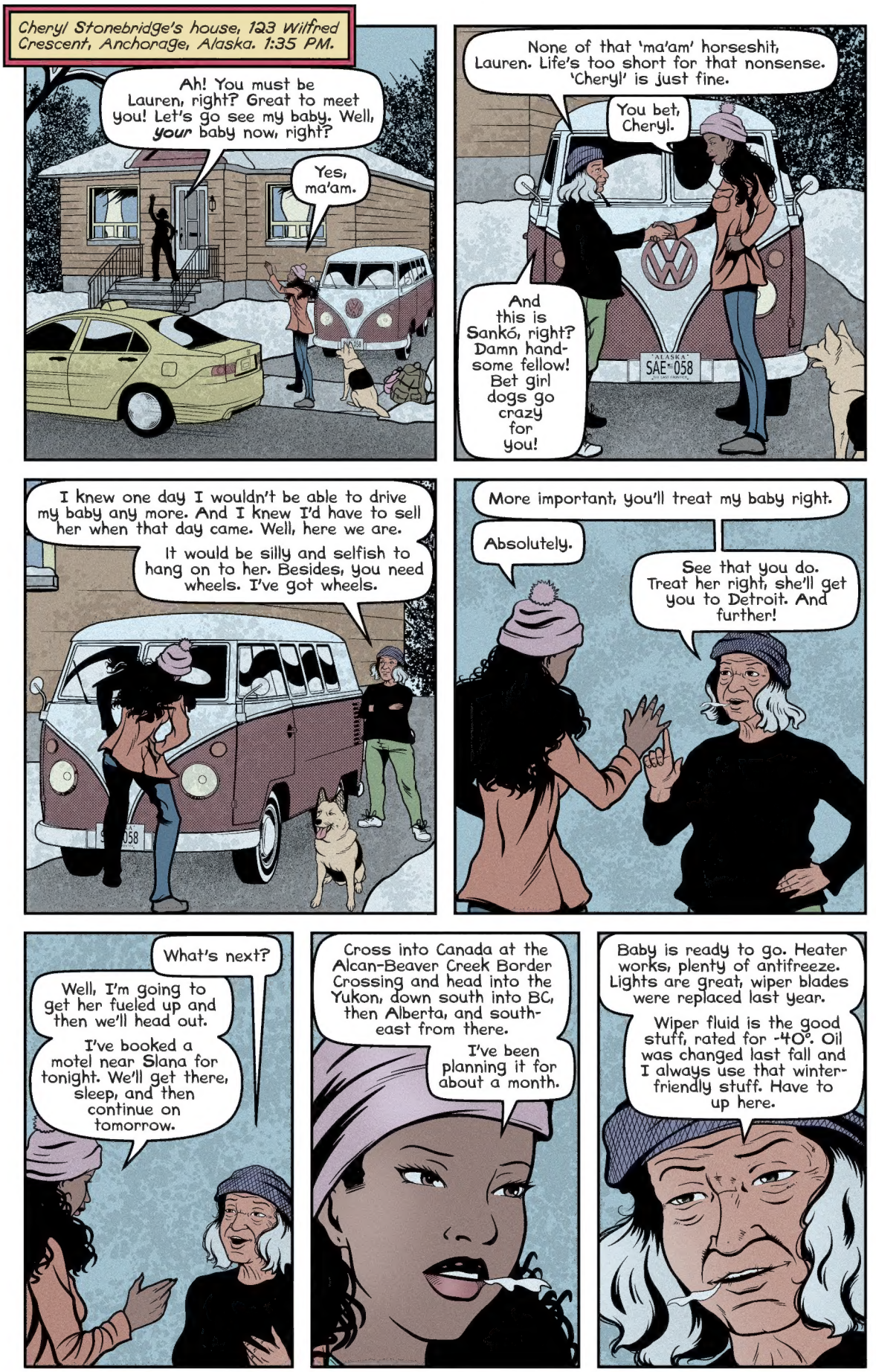
12:02 PM.
The only way to deal with him and ARPC is to *trick* them, 'cuz I sure as hell ain't giving you back. No way.

I think my mom might have tricked him once with you, but she died before I ever found out how. And I know you can't tell me how she did it, huh?
If we can trick him into believing that you're *dead*, that would end it once and for all.

Maybe not right away. He'd still keep watching me so we'd have to be pretty careful.
It just has to be a *believable* trick.

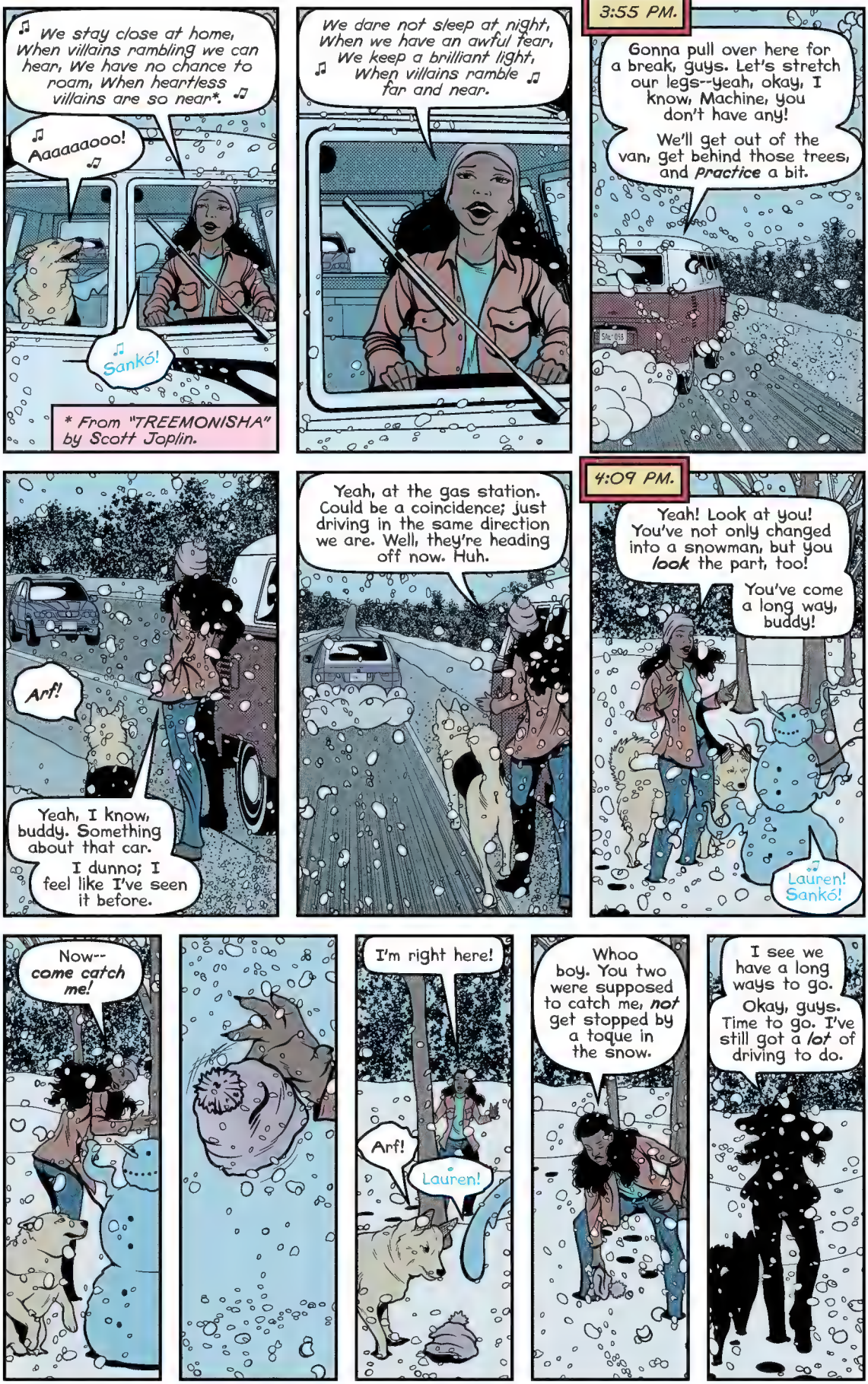
Lake Hood Seaplane Base, near Anchorage, Alaska. 12:55 PM.


1:13 PM.
Well, guys, we're here.
Huh. I'm a bit nervous now. Let's hope Cheryl has our new van in good order or this'll be one short trip.
Thanks for the awesome flight, Mike!
You're very welcome! You can hail a cab at the stand over there and that'll get you into the city proper.
Geez, the mountains are beautiful.
1:21 PM.
TAXI
Bags all stored, Miss. First time in Anchorage?
Yup.
Just remember that you're only an hour or so away from Alaska! Ahem! Sorry, that's a little Anchorage humor!
Where are we going?
We're going to, let's see now, uh, 123 Wilfred Crescent just off of O'Malley Road.
You bet. Won't take long.


Cheryl Stonebridge's house, 123 Wilfred Crescent, Anchorage, Alaska. 1:35 PM.
Ah! You must be Lauren, right? Great to meet you! Let's go see my baby. Well, *your* baby now, right?
Yes, ma'am.
None of that 'ma'am' horseshit, Lauren. Life's too short for that nonsense. 'Cheryl' is just fine.
You bet, Cheryl.
And this is Sankó, right? Damn handsome fellow! Bet girl dogs go crazy for you!
ALASKA
SAE 058
I knew one day I wouldn't be able to drive my baby any more. And I knew I'd have to sell her when that day came. Well, here we are.
It would be silly and selfish to hang on to her. Besides, you need wheels. I've got wheels.
More important, you'll treat my baby right.
Absolutely.
See that you do. Treat her right, she'll get you to Detroit. And further!
What's next?
Well, I'm going to get her fueled up and then we'll head out.
I've booked a motel near Slana for tonight. We'll get there, sleep, and then continue on tomorrow.
Cross into Canada at the Alcan-Beaver Creek Border Crossing and head into the Yukon, down south into BC, then Alberta, and southeast from there.
I've been planning it for about a month.
Baby is ready to go. Heater works, plenty of antifreeze. Lights are great, wiper blades were replaced last year.
Wiper fluid is the good stuff, rated for -40°. Oil was changed last fall and I always use that winter-friendly stuff. Have to up here.

Tires are brand new. Snow tires. And, in the back are a set of *chains*. You ever use chains, Lauren?
Nope.
Right, well, the old ones were a pain in the ass to put on. But these ones attach pretty easily.
This is important. Never drive through rural Alaska, even on AK-1, without a *full* tank of gas, right?
Let me say that again. *Never* drive without a full tank of gas. You see a gas station, pull her over and fuel up. Even if you just did three hours before.
Well, title and plates are in your name. You've got insurance, right?
Yup!
Then she's all yours. Have a blast with her!
1:55 PM.
Bye, Lauren! Bye, baby!
A gas station just off of O'Malley Road. 2:08 PM.
Well, guys. This is it. Once she's fueled up, the road trip finally starts. I wonder what's going to happen next?
2:13 PM.

Glenn Highway (part of Alaska Route 1), near Chickaloon, Alaska. 3:25 PM.
SAE-058


♫ We stay close at home, When villains rambling we can hear, We have no chance to roam, When heartless villains are so near*. ♫
♫ Aaaaaaooo! ♫
♫ Sankó! ♫
* From "TREEMONISHA" by Scott Joplin.
We dare not sleep at night, When we have an awful fear, We keep a brilliant light, When villains ramble far and near. ♫
3:55 PM.
Gonna pull over here for a break, guys. Let's stretch our legs--yeah, okay, I know, Machine, you don't have any!
We'll get out of the van, get behind those trees, and practice a bit.
Arf!
Yeah, I know, buddy. Something about that car.
I dunno; I feel like I've seen it before.
Yeah, at the gas station. Could be a coincidence; just driving in the same direction we are. Well, they're heading off now. Huh.
4:09 PM.
Yeah! Look at you! You've not only changed into a snowman, but you look the part, too!
You've come a long way, buddy!
♫ Lauren! Sankó! ♫
Now-- come catch me!
I'm right here!
Arf!
Lauren!
Whoo boy. You two were supposed to catch me, not get stopped by a toque in the snow.
I see we have a long ways to go.
Okay, guys. Time to go. I've still got a lot of driving to do.

Fernsby's Motel just off Alaska Route 1, Slana, Alaska. 7:12 PM.
Well, first leg of the trip is done. Tomorrow we'll cross the border into the Yukon. We need to be really careful with that, Machine. Right?
Lauren!
Exactly.
If everything goes well, we should be able to reach Whitehorse by tomorrow night.
Okay, well, I'm hungry.
Arf!
You, too? Gotcha. Well, come on. I'm gonna get some laundry going first. We'll 'nom' when we get back.
7:19 PM.
Huh?!
Oh, hey there. I didn't think anyone was here. Sorry!
Wait! Didn't I see you earlier today?
No, I don't think so.
Yeah, in Anchorage, at a gas station. You were in that BMW.
No.
Uh, no, I'm afraid not. We're tourists. We're on our way to Anchorage.
Really?

Yes.
We flew in from Japan a week ago for some winter fun. Landed in Fairbanks and have been making our way down to Anchorage.
Fun.

We'll be taking a cruise from Anchorage down to the continental United States next week. Then back to Japan after that.
Uh-huh. You know, I *wasn't* asking for your itinerary.
I'm also pretty damn sure I saw you in Anchorage earlier today.

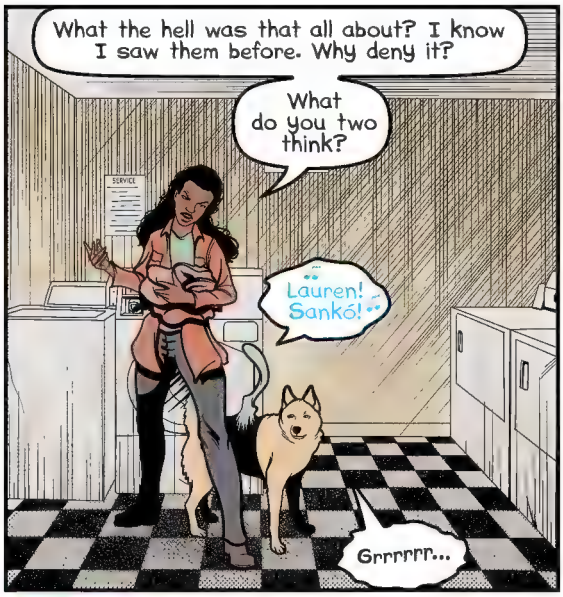
No!
Really?

Yes.
Uh-*huh*.

What do you think, Sankō?
Rowf! Aroof. Ruff. Aooooo. Ruff. Arrrrooo!
I don't believe you. My dog doesn't believe you. Wanna try again?

No.
Right. Have a nice night. **Goodbye.**
! ? !

Bye.


What the hell was that all about? I know I saw them before. Why deny it?
What do you two think?
SERVICE
Lauren! Sankó!
Grrrrrr...

Me, too. Let's see if we can get some answers. I'll leave my laundry here for now.
Machine, stay out of sight. Just "be" Sankó's backpack, okay?
Lauren!

7:27 PM.
Nobody here. Well, they couldn't have gone far. Let's get outside and see if we can spot them.
ROOM
EXIT

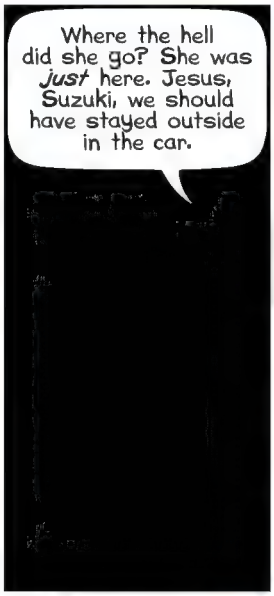
7:29 PM.
You again? Why are you following us? Why won't you leave us alone? We're just tourists.
Nice tourists, with *nothing* to hide. It's cold and we're tired. Please go away.
Go!

Look, I'm really sorry, okay? I'm just a bit jumpy tonight. I'm traveling, too, and motels can be a bit weird.
You never know who's going to be here. I guess I was wrong about you two, though, and I'm very sorry to have bugged you. Please forgive me and have a nice night.

EXIT
'Nice' tourists. *Sure*. Simple tourists my ass.

C'mon, Sankō! *Quick!* Get into that janitor closet!

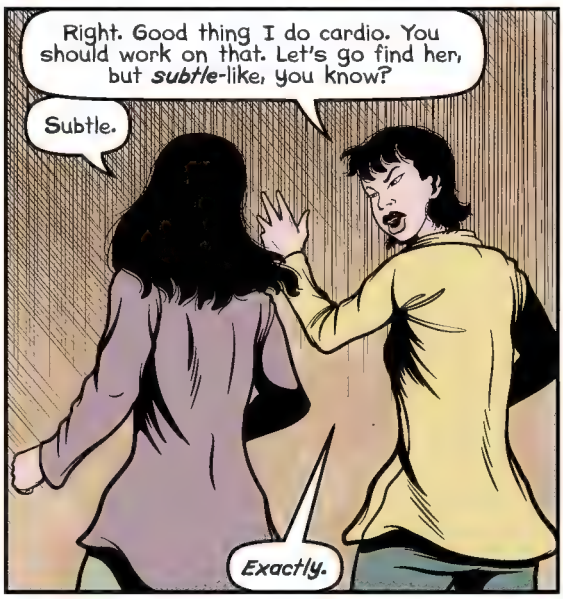
I'm going to close the door. You two: *not* a sound. Hush now.
Hruff.
Sankō. Quiet.


Where the hell did she go? She was *just* here. Jesus, Suzuki, we should have stayed outside in the car.

She'd never have spotted us then. Maybe she went back to her room?
Possibly.

How'd she get around us, though?
Run?

Huh. Loop around the motel to avoid us. Not bad. Maybe she did run, yeah.
Run.
Guess we should chase her?
Yes.


Right. Good thing I do cardio. You should work on that. Let's go find her, but *subtle*-like, you know?
Subtle.
Exactly.

Simple tourists?! Nice tourists?! Just want to be left alone?! Nothing to hide?! Uh-*huh!*
Grrrrrr...

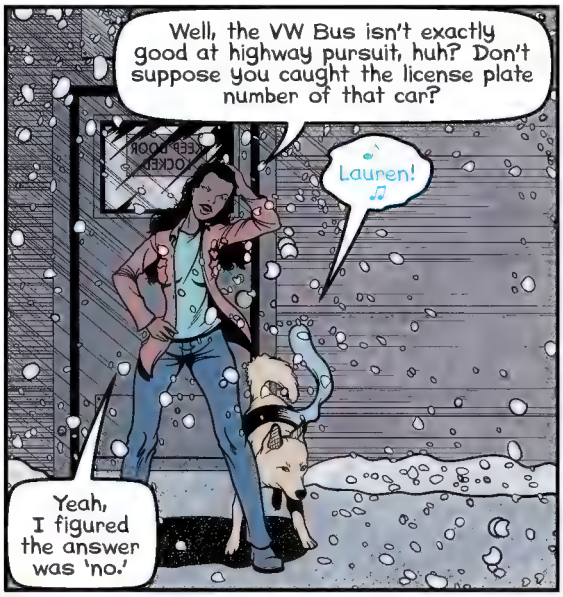
Gotcha. Oh yeah, I heard you. Looking for me? I'm right here.
TO LAUNDRY ROOM
EXIT

Running? You gotta be fucking kidding me. What's going on?

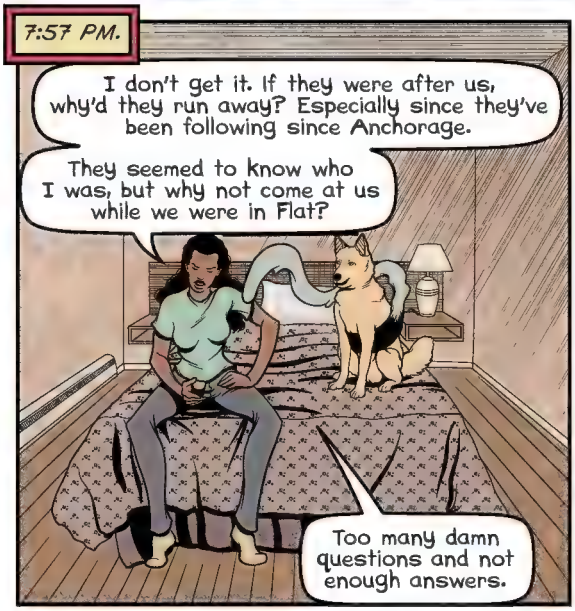
C'mon, Sankó! Run!
Ruff! Arf!

Call them! Tell them to get the car ready! Parking lot!
Car! Parking lot! Now!
She's gonna catch us! Hurry, Suzuki!
Running!
Hurry! She'll catch you!
Phone! No!
Suzuki! Forget it! Leave it!
Fine!

GO!
Go, Go, Go!
Laundry Service
Shit!
What the hell was this all about?
MXA
THE LAST


Well, the VW Bus isn't exactly good at highway pursuit, huh? Don't suppose you caught the license plate number of that car?
Lauren!
Yeah, I figured the answer was 'no.'

Laundry Services
Well, let's grab that dropped phone. Maybe we'll get lucky and it'll be unlocked.


7:57 PM.
I don't get it. If they were after us, why'd they run away? Especially since they've been following since Anchorage.
They seemed to know who I was, but why not come at us while we were in Flat?
Too many damn questions and not enough answers.

Huh. Looks like a burner phone. Not good. Well, whoever they were, they're gone.
I doubt they'll come back for the phone, but they might come back for *us*.

Guys? I think we need to hit the road. Like *right now*.
Let's pack up and get the hell out of here.

Brr-innnng!

Uh-huh. *Figures.* Well, let's see who it is.
Hello?
Hello, Ms. Greene. *Lauren.* This is Richard Blairstone. It's been a long time.* I do hope you remember me.
* Back in #6 -- V
Richard. Of course I do. You're one of Hamilton's lap dogs. Hard to forget you. How'd you find me?
Tracking you down was easy. You ran, but you *never* changed your name. Employment databases, medical records, and travel databases. Pretty easy.
My employer would like his machine back. Mr. Hamilton *will* get his machine back. It's just a matter of time.
Right. I thought it "belonged" to ARPC?
Technically, yes. Advanced Research Projects Corporation does own it, but you and I *both* know that Mr. Hamilton invented the machine.
Fine. He can't have this one back. Tell him to let it go. Tell him to invent another. Tell him to move on with his goddamn life.
No. If you don't get your ass back to Detroit, Hamilton will go after your *friends.*
Do the right thing, no one gets hurt. Do the wrong thing? He'll get the machine back eventually. We'll just tear apart each of your friends first. It's up to you.
The End!

Next!

Richard's back. ARPC's back. Hamilton's back—maybe? They know where Lauren is. And they know where her friends are? There's only one question: what will Lauren do? The answer will come in a tale tantalizingly called...

Glut the soul... with Vengeance!

Along Yukon Highway 1. 7:11 AM.
To recap yesterday's breaking news, British Prime Minister Theresa May had her Brexit deal defeated in a historic--
--Boring! Enough bullshit radio for now!
ROAD TRIP!
SHOCKS!
Still no sign of our 'tail.' It's weird, guys. I thought we'd constantly see them, but they're either keeping their distance--
--or the van really is bugged.
DANGER!
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Glut the soul... with vengeance!
NEXT ISSUE!
God Damn It!!!!
Hamilton is going to take you from us. From Sankó. From m-me. We can't lose you. I can't lose you.
EMOTION!
IT'S THE STORY THAT COUNTS!
At least you'll be able to defend yourself if the worst happens. In the meantime, I'll keep thinking of a way out of this mess.
CHALLENGES!
Sir, it's not my place, but you've shown so much courage. You've worked your way up and--
--T-thank you, Dover, but it's what I need to do to get better.
Same length of time as yesterday?
FEAR!
What if Richard kills me? What if he kills Sankó? You can't just let him take you! Fight! Stop me!
DOUBTS!
I'll make you fight!!!
DESPERATION!
WOLF'S HEAD
LEADS THE WAY FOR EXCITING AND DIFFERENT STORIES!
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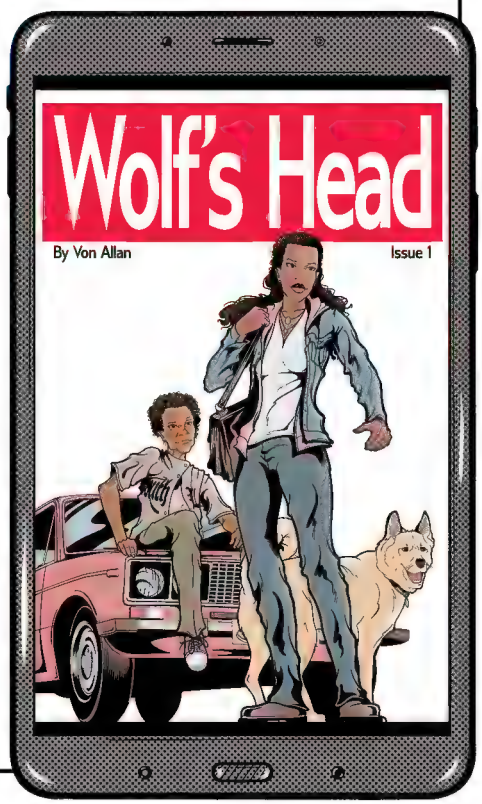

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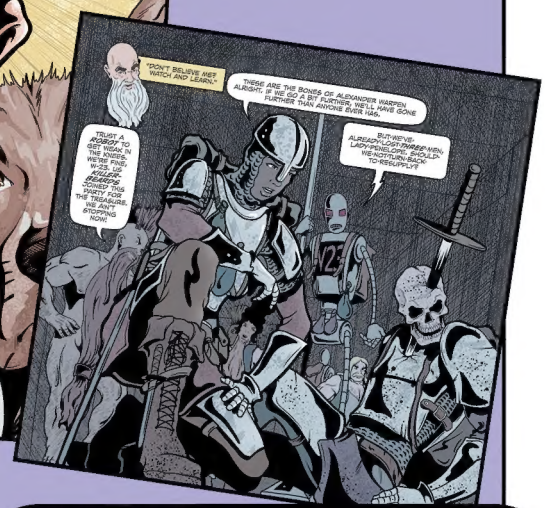

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